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**To:** All staff in Operations

**From:** Paul Archer  
Head of Contact Centres

Mike Baker  
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Paul Williams  
Work Services Director  
Southern England

cc

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### Supporting ESA customers

We are now through our first month of delivery of ESA(C) – issuing letters, making and taking calls, and making decisions on revised benefit entitlement. We wanted to write to you for two reasons.

Firstly, to say a huge thank you for coping extremely well with this additional activity and ensuring that we are, as ever, highly professional in our response to a change. ESA(C) forms an important part of the Welfare Reform changes we are making a reality. We also know that you are making often difficult changes which some of our more vulnerable customers may take some time to accept and adjust to. In all of our Centres, staff have been doing their absolute best to help customers through this change and support them with their claims and future decisions. Thank you and well done.

Secondly, we wanted to ask every member of staff to ensure that every customer contact is handled with the utmost care and sensitivity, taking account of the claimants' circumstances. Every day, we all play a crucial role in the lives of the claimants we deal with. Whilst it is never easy to make a judgment about which is the exceptional case from the thousands of others we handle on a daily basis, we must ensure that during our interactions with people we all remain alert to the possibility of having to deal with a claimant in a more empathetic way because of the effect the changes we are introducing may have on them. Where there is difficulty we must take time to properly understand the claimant's circumstances, and reassure them that, as a Department, we will help them by talking through their options or signposting them to other sources of support/advice in a way that meets their needs.

As an organisation we strive to put in place effective processes and guidance and ensure that all of our people have the appropriate training. The complex nature of our business, however, means that sometimes, whilst procedures are followed correctly, something goes wrong. The consequences of getting this wrong can have profound results.

Very sadly, only last week a customer of DWP attempted suicide – said to be a result of receiving a letter informing him that due to the introduction of time-limiting contribution based Employment and Support Allowance for people not in the Support Group, his contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance was going to stop. We are not yet clear on the full circumstances of this case and cannot be clear on what factors contributed. Incidents of this kind are thankfully rare, but it does remind us of the responsibility we have, and influence we have, over the lives of those we provide help to. Sometimes ensuring that a claimant simply understands changes to their benefit and following a process is not enough.

The ESA legislative Changes Project issued a wide range of guidance covering the change (ESA(C) Guidance) which links to generic guidance on Vulnerable Customers (Vulnerable); a subject also covered in the L&D made available for the change.

We will be reviewing the circumstances of this case in more detail to establish what more we might have done and to put in place appropriate measures to ensure that we are better prepared for dealing with similar situations should they arise in the future. If you feel you need additional products, support or guidance on whatever aspect of handing ESA cases (or indeed any benefit) please do ask your line manager or let us know. Until then, we would like to thank each of you for your professionalism and continued support in communicating these changes to people.



Paul Archer



Mike Baker



Paul Williams